

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ARAE-00 MC-02 ACDA-05 OMB-01 AID-05

IGA-02 EB-07 COME-00 TRSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04

H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

SS-15 SSO-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 /073 W

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O R 271655Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 122

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

AMEMBASSY LIMA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY MEXICO

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SAN SALVADOR 0430

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR ES

SUBJ: REGIONAL STUDY ON CONVENTIONAL ARMS SUPPLY RESTRAINTS

REF: STATE 15423

1. FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EL SALVADOR, IT IS DIFFICULT TO VIEW  
WITH ANYTHING APPROACHING ALARM THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE HOST  
GOVERNMENT MIGHT ENTER INTO, OR SUSTAIN, AN "ARMS RACE". NOT-  
WITHSTANDING OCCASIONAL STORIES IN THE HONDURAN PRESS CLAIMING  
THAT THE MOLINA REGIME HAS EMBARKED ON A MASSIVE WEAPONS  
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PROCUREMENT PROGRAM, THE HARD FACTS OF LIFE FOR THIS TINY

COUNTRY, WITH TOO MANY PEOPLE AND TOO LITTLE OF EVERYTHING ELSE, DO NOT PERMIT SUCH PURCHASES. THE FACTORS THAT INHIBIT THE SALVADORAN MILITARY FROM BUYING ARMS IT MIGHT COVET ARE OF SUCH A MAGNITUDE AND CONSTANCY THAT EACH PURCHASE IS A SIGNIFICANT EVENT. THESE RESTRAINT FACTORS ARE NOT LIKELY TO CHANGE IN THE FUTURE.

2. IT IS DIFFICULT TO VIEW THE SALVADORAN DEFENSE SERVICES (ONE OF WHOSE PRINCIPAL RESPONSIBILITIES IS TO MAINTAIN DOMESTIC ORDER) - WITH ITS NEWEST POLICE PATROL VEHICLES BEING SECOND-HAND MIAMI POLICE CARS OF MID-TO LATE SIXTIES VINTAGE - AND THINK IN TERMS OF AN ARMS RACE. SIMILARLY, THE NAVY'S LARGEST VESSELS ARE THE THREE JUST PURCHASED 110' COASTALPATROL BOATS, AND OFFENSIVE THREAT TO NO ONE AND WITHIN THE OBVIOUS NEEDS OF A COUNTRY WITH A 200 MILE COASTLINE AND UNKNOWN MARITIME RESOURCES IN ITS SEAS. SALVADOR'S RELATIVELY ACTIVE MILITARY PROCUREMENT DURING THE PAST THREE YEARS REPRESENTS A LONG OVERDUE "MODERNIZATION" PROGRAM OF MODEST PROPORTIONS IN KEEPING WITH THIS COUNTRY'S LEGITIMATE SECURITY NEEDS AS THE GOES DISPASSIONATELY SEES THEM.

3. THE FOLLOWING ARE THE FACTORS DICTATING RESTRAINT IN ARMS PROCUREMENT, AS REQUESTED IN PARA 2, (1) REFTEL:

(A) LACK OF MONETARY RESOURCES - THIS IS A SMALL UNDERDEVELOPED NATION WHICH, UNLIKE SOME OF THE LARGER ONES, IS UNABLE TO ACCUMULATE LARGE AMOUNTS OF FOREIGN EXCHANGE WITH WHICH TO BUY WEAPONRY. THE NEED TO CAREFULLY HUSBAND THESE SCARCE RESERVES, AND THE STRUGGLE AMONG COMPETING SECTORS IN THEIR EXPENDITURE, IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT RESTRAINT. THE VARIOUS COMPONENTS OF THE ARMED FORCE, AS WELL AS THE POLICE/SECURITY FORCES, MUST ALL COMPETE WITH EACH OTHER AS WELL AS WITH THE HARD-PRESSED CIVILIAN MINISTRIES FOR THE BUDGET SLICES. THE RESULT IS VERY THICK SLICES FOR EVERYONE.

(B) LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND HUMAN RESOURCES - ANOTHER SIDE OF THE TIGHT RESOURCES RESTRAINT ON ARM PURCHASES IN A LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND HUMAN CAPABILITIES. FOR EXAMPLE, ALTHOUGH THE AIR COMPONENT OF THE ARMED FORCE HAS PURCHASED JET FIGHTERS

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(18 FROM ISRAEL IN 1973), IT DOES NOT HAVE THE PILOTS TO FLY ALL THE PLANES IT ALREADY HAS IN ITS ARSENAL. WHAT PILOTS IT HAS TRAINED, AT GREAT COST AND TIME, ARE OFTEN LOST TO BETTER PAYING SERVICE WITH THE AIRLINES. THE SCALE OF THINGS IS SO MINISCULE THAT, ALTHOUGH WE SPEAK OF THE SALVADORAN NAVY, WE ARE TALKING ABOUT A FORCE THAT KNOWS ITSELF INCAPABLE OF ASPIRING TO VESSELS BEYOND THE PRESENT PATROL BOAT FLEET.

(C) CENTRAL AMERICAN SOLIDARITY - ALTHOUGH THE CACM IS HARDLY A FULLY FUNCTIONING POLITICAL/ECONOMIC ENTITY, THE EXISTENCE OF A CENTURY AND A HALF COMMITMENT TO THE IDEAL OF CENTRAL AMERICAN INTEGRATION TRANSLATES INTO A RESTRAINT ON ANY OF THE FIVE COUNTRIES ARMING ITSELF TO COMMIT AGGRESSION AGAINST ITS NEIGHBORS. WHILE THE 1969 WAR WITH HONDURAS QUITE OBVIOUSLY ILLUSTRATES THAT REGIONAL CONFLICTS CAN ERUPT, THE REALIZATION THAT THE THREAT OF WAR FROM THE IMMEDIATE NEIGHBORS IS FAIRLY REMOST ACTS AS A BRAKE ON ARMS PROCUREMENT. THE REGION IS NOT A PERU-CHILE-BOLIVIA SITUATION, MUCH LESS A BRAZIL-ARGENTINA-CHILE ONE.

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INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SAN SALVADOR 0430

4. THE FOLLOWING ARE OBSTACLES TO ARMS RESTRAINTS, AS PARA 2

(2) REFTEL:

(A) EXISTENCE OF UNSETTLED DISPUTE WITH HONDURAS - AS LONG AS THE BOUNDARY PROBLEM WITH HONDURAS REMAINS UNSETTLED, THERE WILL BE THOSE WITHIN EL SALVADOR WHO WILL PUSH FOR ARMS PROCUREMENT AND OTHER EVIDENCES OF MILITARY PREPAREDNESS.

(B) EXISTENCE OF TERRORIST THREAT - RECENT PROOF THAT TERRORIST CELLS OPERATE IN EL SALVADOR, A COUNTRY WHERE THE ARMED FORCE HAS A MAJOR RESPONSIBILITY FOR DOMESTIC ORDER, ALSO TRANSLATES INTO SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO WANT THE MILITARY AS CONFIDENTIAL

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PREPARED AS IT CAN BE TO MEET ANY THREAT.

5. THE POSSIBILITY OF A SUB-REGIONAL APPROACH, IN THIS CASE A CENTRAL AMERICAN ONE, MAKES SENSE. AS MENTIONED ABOVE, THE FACTOR OF CA SOLIARITY INHIBITING EACH OF THE COUNTRIES ARMS PURCHASES IS NOT ONLY A POSSIBILITY FOR THE FUTURE, IT OCCURS AT THE PRESENT TIME. ANYTHING THAT COULD BE DONE TO STRENGTHEN THIS FEELING OF SUB-REGIONAL SOLIDARITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE WOULD LESSEN THE PRESSURES FOR WEAPON ACQUISITION.

6. EL SALVADOR WOULD BE JUST AS SENSITIVE AS OTHER LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES TO A "US LEAD IN REGIONAL ARMS RESTRAINT" IF THAT MEANS THE US CAUTIONING, WARNING OR PUNISHING LATIN AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS FOR THEIR ARMS PROCUREMENT DECISIONS. THIS CONSTITUTES THE SAME PATERNALISTIC ATTITUDE AND GRATUITOUS ADVICE THAT LATINS HAVE RESENTED FOR MANY YEARS, AND IS INCONSISTENT WITH OUR OWN RECENT PRONOUNCEMENTS OF NON-INTERFERENCE IN HEMISPHERIC INTERNAL AFFAIRS.

7. THE MOST FEASIBLE APPROACH TO ARMS RESTRAINT WITH EL SALVADOR IS NOT AMONG THOSE MENTIONED IN PARA 2 (5) REFTEL, I. E., "NON-ACQUISITION, CEILINGS DISARMAMENT, ETC.". DESPITE OUR FEARS, EL SALVADOR WILL NOT SQUANDER ITS SCARCE RESOURCES ON SHOWY WEAPONRY, AND IT WOULD RESENT THE US LECTURING IT THAT IT SHOULDN'T DO SO. POOR NATIONS, LIKE POOR PEOPLE, LIKE TO WINDOW SHOP AND FANTASIZE FROM TIME TO TIME, ESPECIALLY IF THE STORE WINDOWS ARE DESIGNED TO LURE SHOPPERS. THEY EVEN OCCASIONALLY MAKE A SILLY BUY OR GO INTO DEBT OVER THEIR HEADS. BUT THE FIRST AND LARGEST AMOUNTS OF THEIR SCARCE RESOURCES GO FOR MORE SENSIBLE PURCHASES. THE "PROSPECTS OF RESTRAINT" DO NOT THEREFORE, AS THE REFTEL SUGGESTS, "SEEM SO UNPROMISING" IN EL SALVADOR'S CASE. AS THE SLOW BUT APPARENTLY REAL INTEGRATION OF THE SUB-REGION ADVANCES, THE NEED FOR DEFENSE FROM EXTERNAL THREAT WEAPONS WILL BE PERCEIVED TO DIMINISH. THIS IS THE MOST PROMISING AND FEASIBLE FUTURE RESTRAINT. THE SUBSTITUTION OF ALTERNATIVE, OR EVEN COMPLIMENTARY, US INDUCEMENTS, SUCH AS A US SECURITY GUARANTEE OR US SUPPLY IN LIEU OF LOCAL MANUFACTURE,

DO NOT MAKE MUCH SENSE IN EL SALVADOR AND WOULD PROVE ILLUSORY IN  
OUR JUDGEMENT.

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## Message Attributes

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